

Talk by Diana Johnson

Luke 2.22–40

St Mary and St Michael, Trumpington

7th Feb 2021 Candlemas (slightly delayed as it was midweek)

All-Age on-line Service 10am



Play a version of the Nunc Dimittis instead of the introductory hymn

Reading was Luke 2:22-39, the verses of which adults are invited to have open on their laps.

Explain that you are going to tell a story about two old people who were waiting for a rescuer. They lived a long time ago. These two old people weren't involved in a crash, they weren't in a storm, they weren't even ill. In fact nobody would have said they were in any real danger or difficulty. Their names were Simeon and Anna and they were friends. Anna's husband had died when she was a young woman and since then she had spent her life living in and looking after God's Temple in Jerusalem. Simeon lived in the same city. Both Simeon and Anna loved God very much. Anna would spend her days in God's special house, the Temple, and, while she did all her ordinary tasks, she would sing praises to God. I know, that might sound a bit creepy, but I prefer to think of her as one of those people who are incurably *cheerful*. Simeon would spend his days praying and listening to God. I think of him as rather a thinker – a spiritual type. Maybe not the chattiest person on God's earth.

So why did they need a rescuer? Well, both of them were very concerned about their country and their people. The little country of Israel had been taken over by a foreign power. What was worse was that many of the people who had once loved God seemed to have forgotten all about him. Their world was really in quite a mess. So what is new?

Both Simeon and Anna were getting old but they were both waiting for a special event. God had promised that he would send a rescuer for his people, someone who would help them to love God again. Anna was cheerfully sure she would meet this rescuer one day, and so, in his own quiet way, was Simeon.

One day, the big Temple doors swung open, and in walked a couple carrying a little baby. This happened quite often as the custom was for parents to bring their little babies to the Temple to say a special thank you to God. Anna always loved to stop what she was doing and to welcome these little families. On this particular day, Mary and Joseph has brought baby Jesus to the Temple. He was only six weeks old. Mary had wrapped her baby in a warm shawl for the long journey to Jerusalem. I wonder if that faithful donkey had carried them along the way again?

'Oh said Anna, a little baby!' 'How lovely.'



At that moment something amazing happened. Her old friend Simeon arrived at the Temple too. That morning, when he had been praying, he had just felt that he should go to the Temple. Old Simeon approached the young couple, looked closely at the tiny child and then took him in his arms.

'He doesn't usually do that,' thought Anna in surprise.

A big smile came over Simeon's face. 'O God,' he said, 'you promised you would send somebody to rescue your people and now I have seen him. This little baby! **He is a light to the world.**'

Well, that is the short version. In the bible it gives the full thing, which we heard sung just now, and which I'll say now again:

'Master [or Lord], now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

Back to the story:

Anna gasped. She saw it too. Here – here - was the rescuer for whom she had waited such a long time. But, a baby! She hadn't expected that! She smiled, and then she laughed, and then she had a cuddle of this special baby. And then she spent the rest of the day telling everyone else who came to the Temple all about Jesus! She didn't get much else done that day!

Time for reflection

Then light the candle. Ask people to observe the candle's light. Candles are a symbol, which we use a lot in church, a symbol of the bringing of light where there is darkness; of bringing light as a symbol of hope and goodness; of the life-giving properties of light. We are not alone in this – other faiths use candles, too, and you may also be aware of stories where light symbolizes goodness triumphing over evil, such as the Hindu festival of Diwali. Candles are powerful symbols, and we are celebrating them today, on what the church calls 'Candlemas'

We Christians light candles at Candlemas to help us remember Simeon's words about Jesus. We describe Jesus as 'The light of the world'. We try to follow the example of Jesus and live their lives as lights shining in the world.

Ask people to look at the Candle here on my desk. Imagine the candle's flame in silence and as you do think about this questions:

1. What does it mean to shine like a candle in our world?
2. How could I be like a candle in the world?

Let us pray

Say: In a world that can seem dark and lonely, may we shine like lights bringing joy and hope into each other's lives.



This is a prayer that is said at the end of the day:

Lighten our darkness,
Lord we pray;
And in your mercy defend us
From all perils and dangers of this night;
For the love of your only Son,
Our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The words of Simeon have become known as the Song of Simeon, or the Nunc Dimittis, and have had an important place in Christian worship over the centuries. The words have been set to music by many composers and are widely available, for example in settings of Choral Evensong recorded by many cathedral choirs. The one we are listening to today was recorded specially for services like this, by the people of St Martin's in the Fields in London.

Amen

To end, play the music again, asking people to listen for Simeon's words from the Bible story about the presentation of Jesus in the Temple.